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The Secrecy Czar

By Tom Wicker

Admiral Stansfield Turner, the director of the Central Intelligence Agency, is reliably reported to be proceeding at flank speed with his efforts to persuade Congress to create a "czar" with direct control over the entire intelligence community, including agencies now a part of the Defense and State Departments.

President Carter, for his part, seems not to have interested himself deeply in the Admiral's proposal, commissioning his old Annapolis classmate to provide him with an effective, trustworthy, disciplined intelligence service.

But elsewhere in Washington, Admiral Turner's plan for an intelligence "czar" with direct budgetary and operating control over all the intelligence agencies is not necessarily regarded as the best way to prevent repetition of past abuses, or to provide the Government with the most objective, timely and reliable intelligence.

Here, for example, is the opposing rationale of one official with much knowledge of the intelligence community (who admits to an institutional interest in defeating the Turner proposal):

Most of the abuses were committed by the C.I.A., although some of the electronic surveillances conducted by the National Security Agency (controlled by Defense) were also tainted. For the most part, N.S.A., the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Reconnaissance Center (which operates satellites under Defense Department control) and the State Department's intelligence unit were not involved in law-breaking or violations of citizens' rights. Why, then, is reorganization of the whole community under a czar needed to correct abuses that were centered in the C.I.A.?

As for coordinating the work of the intelligence agencies to produce a more reliable product, the director of the C.I.A., wearing his less publicized hat as the overall Director of Central Intelligence, already has much of the necessary power. In this view, however, the D.C.I.'s responsibility for coordinating the work of the intelligence community has too often been subordinated, over the years, to his more glamorous operating role as chief of the C.I.A.—particularly to that agency's covert operations abroad, which represent a relatively small part of the total intelligence effort.

Different intelligence agencies, moreover, have different needs. The C.I.A. is primarily interested in "national intelligence"—including economic and political information. The

about troop movements, weapons concentrations, and the like. Would a czar, particularly one coming out of one of the component agencies, fairly represent the needs and interests of each? Or is the present divided responsibility more likely to keep any one agency from being shortchanged or ignored?

In this view, it's conceded that the Defense Department, which receives about 70 percent of the intelligence budget, may now get too big a cut of the pie—that, for example, the D.I.A. probably is overstaffed and overfunded. But some Pentagon intelligence work—satellite operations, for example—is the most expensive and possibly the most useful of all. And if the Pentagon should not have control of 70 percent of the intelligence budget, should any one man have control of 100 percent of it?

The major question being raised about the Turner proposal, in fact, is whether any official should have so much power—line, budget and what the bureaucrats call "tasking" control over all the agencies of the intelligence community. The question is not asked so much about Admiral Turner himself, or to question his competence and trustworthiness; but the fact is that neither he nor President Carter will always be in office and an arrangement that might be suitable for them could be disastrous in other hands.

Clearly, Admiral Turner or any other intelligence czar would have power and position ranking him with the Secretaries of State and Defense—neither of whom would any longer have an institutional base within the community, and would be dependent on him for intelligence services. In cases of strong disagreement between State and Defense—one has only to go back to Henry Kissinger and James Schlesinger in the Nixon and Ford Administrations—the third member of such a triumvirate would have unmatched, perhaps dangerous power to affect policy.

His power would be grounded, moreover, in the necessary secrecy of intelligence work and would not therefore be fully subject to the usual checks and balances. In all probability, no American official ever has had such a monopoly of secret power as Admiral Turner now seeks for an intelligence czar.

For that reason alone, and no matter what his final view, President Carter should interest himself in the Turner plan at least to the extent he did in the B-1 decision. And if the dangers of the proposal appear to him too great, he can always tell Admiral Turner to use to the fullest the powers